

There's a tradition at American weddings ... where the groom takes the garter from the bride's leg and tosses it to the unmarried guys in the crowd. Then the bride takes her bouquet and tosses it to the unmarried girls in the crowd. According to tradition, those who catch the flying objects are the next to be married.

There's a tradition at Jewish weddings ... that sometime after the groom had gotten permission from the bride's parents to marry their daughter, he would go over to the bride's house in the evening and escort her to the wedding banquet. The bridesmaids would pick a spot between the bride's house and the reception, and wait for the bride and groom to come. As the couple approached, they would escort them to the wedding celebration with lamps.

There's also a tradition that God has and it's not just with weddings. He has a tradition of keeping his Word. He's promised that his Son will come again to judge the living and the dead. On that Last Day, he'll take some - the wise, with him to heaven; but others - the foolish, he won't. The question is, as we look at today's Parable:

Wise or Foolish? Which One Are You?

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

When we hear the phrase "**the kingdom of heaven**," it can have several meanings in the Bible. Most often it means God working in the hearts of believers through his Word. It can also mean heaven itself. Neither of those make sense in this context. In our parable, "**the kingdom of heaven**" is the visible church here on earth. In our parable, Jesus is the bridegroom, who comes at an unknown time to take those who are wise to the wedding feast in heaven.

Using a wedding to picture things for us in the Bible isn't unusual. OT prophets and John the Baptist called Jesus the bridegroom. Jesus referred to

himself in the same way. And how about Jesus first miracle? Changing water into wine at the Cana wedding. Since weddings are such happy earthly occasions, no wonder Scripture pictures heaven as a wedding feast.

The 10 virgins – 5 wise and 5 foolish – represent the visible church on earth, eagerly waiting for Jesus to return. Identifying some as wise and some as foolish reminds us of the wise and foolish builders in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In both cases, if we take the wise to be believers and the foolish to be unbelievers, we miss the point. Jesus is preaching to his church. He's warning the foolish to: "*wise up.*"

We're part of this picture, because you and I are part of the visible church on earth. So: **Wise or Foolish? Which One Are You?**

Jesus isn't talking IQ here. The foolish virgins were foolish, because they let the oil in their lamps run out and didn't have any extra. The wise virgins were wise, because when their lamps were ready to run out of oil, they had extra.

In our parable, the oil is the Word of God that keeps our lamps of faith burning brightly. Romans tells us: "**Faith comes from hearing the message.**" If you don't have oil, your lamp of faith won't keep burning. It'll go out. God wants us to keep feeding our faith with his Word - so it doesn't run out before Judgment Day.

It's such a simple formula ... Read the Word ... Believe in Jesus ... Keep your lamp burning ... Go to heaven. That's why is today's parable, Jesus is begging us to be wise in our use of the Gospel, and not foolish. He's concerned, because he knows if our faith isn't continually fueled by the Word of God, it will go out.

Our parable identifies half of the virgins as foolish, to remind us that during the end times - in which we live - many will fail to make use of his Word and Sacrament. For our own spiritual good and eternal

welfare, we've got to ask the tough question again:
Wise or Foolish? Which One Are You?

There are times in our lives when we can really identify with the wise virgins in our parable. Times when we were into the Word ... excited about it and eager to learn more ... overwhelmed by God's presence and grace. When was that for you?

- Was it on your Confirmation Day? You stood before the Lord and vowed to be faithful to the One who is always faithful to you.
- Was it on your Wedding Day? You and your spouse stood before the Lord and heard that the 2 of you weren't heading into this alone. Jesus Christ would be the daily guest in your marriage.
- Was it on the day you marveled at God's miracle of life as you held your child? Or, was it the day that God took your child and made him or her his child by simply applying water in Baptism?
- Was it when you or someone close to you got very sick? Or, when death hit close to home and you so appreciated to hear God's promises of peace and comfort and encouragement?

Yes, those were times when we were excited about the Word and eager to learn more. But it does happen, in between life's milestones and in the middle of our daily routines, that we can also identify with the foolish virgins in our parable.

Remember, they were foolish because they let the oil run out in their lamps and didn't have any extra. Why did they run out? Why didn't they have extra?

- Maybe they didn't think they had the time to get extra oil because their schedules were too busy. Are you too busy to hear or read God's Word? Foolishly, we don't find time for God's Word because we don't think it's important. God's Word fuels your faith. Without it your faith will flame out.

- Maybe they didn't think they needed extra oil because they had enough. Haven't you been tempted to think: *"I already know that stuff about Jesus ... his birth, life, death and resurrection. I already know what I need to know."* It should come as no surprise then, that when we face difficulty, that flame of our faith flickers. We haven't been fueling it with God's Word and the Lord's Supper.

Don't be fooled into thinking that faith is reciting Bible facts and once we can, we've got enough. Faith is based on the Biblical facts of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection, but it is also a living and active and growing connection to Jesus Christ.

- Maybe those foolish virgins didn't have extra oil, because they thought they had time to get more later. But before they did, the Bridegroom arrived. We may be tempted to think: *"I'm busy now, but I'll have time for church and the Bible later on."* We don't know that. None of us knows whether today is our last day, or when the Bridegroom will return.
- Maybe they thought something other than oil would help them. They'll get into the banquet because they were part of a group. A membership in a church doesn't save a soul. Faith does. Then there's the idea that the faith of a Christian spouse or parent can help. That's quite common. Someone else's faith can't save a soul. A personal faith in Jesus and what he's done is the only way to connect to him and his salvation.

Yes, there are times when we have been wise and foolish. Thankfully, the Lord forgives our foolishness.

In today's parable, Jesus encourages you to: *"Be wise!"* Worship in-person or online. Read your Bibles and devotions at home. And keep it up! Only the Holy Scriptures are able to make you WISE for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.